

HISTORY OF THE MATER INFIRMORUM HOSPITAL

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IT HAS always been my belief—and my limited experience has confirmed it—that one of the most difficult parts of any piece of writing is to give it a title. It becomes, of course, relatively simple when one has a neatly categorised scientific subject, where one starts with the title and proceeds from there. Even here there can be difficulties, if one wishes the audience to know clearly what is in store. For example, “Thoughts on dyspareunia” might well be, and should be, soberly scientific, but it could be mildly irreverent or it might be frankly obscene. There is a case to be made for doing the job first and putting a label on it afterwards.

Unfortunately I didn’t do so. I was, of course, flattered to be asked to address this Society; I was pleased that it should be on this particular subject; and I was foolish enough to forget that I have no claims to be an historian of any sort or description. I can only ask you to accept the definition of some witty Irishman, whose name I cannot trace—that “A title, sir, is but a peg on which to hang a few thoughts.”

All that I can hope to convey to you is a little potted history of our origin and growth, some of the thoughts and flavour of our forbears, and perhaps, if I am fortunate, some sense of identity and purpose that springs from those origins and those earlier generations—that elusive but very real thing that we can call a tradition.

I am indeed glad to talk to you on this subject, and for two reasons; for the uncomplicated, and I think pardonable one, that I take a pride in my hospital, which has never known any sort of affluence, and has, with remarkable persistence, survived through some very difficult times. The other reason is that “the Mater” is a topical subject. In the early part of the year the “News Letter” carried a modest headline: “1968—the Year of the Mater.” Now, I do not take everything that the “News Letter” says as gospel, or even prophetic, but I found it encouraging to read a sympathetic account of our difficulties, and an optimistic forecast of an early end to these. The year is growing old; but while a medical training does not foster any unduly optimistic view of life it does teach us that we must not abandon the patient while there is life. And there is still a great deal of vigour in this particular patient. On a note of optimism, therefore, I think it right and proper that if the prodigal—after long absence—is to return to the bosom of the family, they should refresh their memories of what kind of brother he is—or was. One dreadful thought does occur to me—that I may be rather like the man who invites his friends to a party and then bores them to tears with not only this year’s holiday pictures, but the whole dreary collection. Anyhow, I promise not to take too long, and I hope that you will grant me the indulgence usually given to such well meaning fellows.

The story of the Mater takes us straightaway to the arrival in Belfast of the Order of the Sisters of Mercy, who established this Hospital. They came originally

to start a school. The first reference to them, or at least I think it is the first, came from the pen of Mary Ann McCracken, in a letter written to a relative when she was an old woman of 87 years—old, but still alert and interested. “We have got a model school and a nunnery in Belfast, both well worth coming to see. I have visited both, and was quite delighted with them; they are such spacious buildings, and the nuns are so pleasing in their manners—but I think, with the same desire to be useful, they could be more so if at perfect liberty.” Strange, that one hundred years later, Mary Ann’s wish should be fulfilled—when the Sisters walk the streets freely, chattering gaily away, and even compete in their Austin 1100 to hold up the traffic on the Crumlin Road.

The Sisters of Mercy had been long established in St. Paul’s Convent, Crumlin Road, before the notion of a hospital was conceived. When the Catholic Bishop of the time—Dr. Dorrian (Fig. 1)—entertained the idea he turned naturally to this Order; for since they went with Florence Nightingale to the battlefields of the Crimea, their fame as a nursing order was worldwide.

The first reference to the Mater comes in a small devotional pamphlet published for the nuns by the Ulster Examiner in 1876. They had just erected a small grotto, or shrine, in the convent grounds—to the Mother of God, to implore her help in establishing a hospital for the poor of the city and the province. “All offerings will be funded, until a sufficient sum can be raised to secure an edifice worthy of the people of Belfast, and suitable for the reception of its sick and suffering inhabitants; where all their wants, spiritual and temporal, will be carefully attended to, and where the sufferers will enjoy the fullest rights of conscience”. It was a noble ideal, and its practice has continued down the years. Some money was collected, and in 1883 Dr. Dorrian purchased for £2,300 the building known as Bedeque House, and spent a considerable sum in conversion (Fig.2). It was opened as the



1. *The Late Most Rev. Dr. Dorrian*

“Mater Infirmorum” or Mother of the Sick. The cottage next door was made into a dispensary, with small wards upstairs. The house itself had been built in 1823 by a Mr. Gordon A. Thompson. Of him the record says: “This beautiful house had rich stores of curiosities and relics gathered in many lands. He had previously led a Bohemian life.” A suspicious—if not sinister—juxtaposition of sentences. In a work he called “Early Australian Reminiscences” he described himself as “a relic of the past century”, having been born in 1799. He died on June 8th,

1886, at Bedeque House—not in Belfast but in West Melbourne. There is, alas, no portrait; and the rich stores of curiosities and relics were, no doubt, converted into pills and surgical dressings.



2. *The original Mater Infirmorum Hospital, Bedeque House, 1883*

The anonymous scribe goes on to say: "We consider it to be part of our work as a chronicler, to give a short description of the hospital at its opening. Though apparently unmeaning for our generation, the description will be of interest to those who come after us". To this, my own reaction is: "Stout fellow!" You may prefer to endorse his next remark, which reads: "We fully confess that we are ambitious enough to write for posterity, though some humorous mortal may say that we are taking advantage of it".

I will spare you the full description; but I think that one or two sentences are worth quoting: "The attics are occupied by the Sisters". "From the windows of the hospital good views are obtained of Cavehill and Hannahstown mountains, and the bracing airs of these higher latitudes are always playing about the venerable

old pile". Lastly, from the same source : "We may justly say with Duncan—'This hospital hath a pleasant seat; the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself unto our gentle senses'." He is recalling—and what a strange and nostalgic thought it now is—the lovely garden at the rear of the hospital with its pretty conservatories, its flower-beds and its hothouses.

From Dublin, where the Order had another Branch, the Sisters imported an experienced nurse to come and organise the new venture. She was Sister Mary Magdalene from the Mater Misericordiae Hospital. She found herself in charge of a much smaller institution—some 34 beds; small, but in the context of the times, ambitious enough. And so, modestly, but full of hope and sustained by charity, the Mater Hospital began.

For its size it had quite an impressive Medical Staff. The Consultant Physician was Alexander Harkin, M.D., F.R.C.S. James Fegan, Esq., F.R.C.S.I., was its Surgeon. On the Visiting Staff were Alexander Dempsey, M.D., F.R.C.S.I.; Peter O'Connell, M.D.; J. McStay, L.D.S., R.C.S.Eng. The Resident Surgeon was one F. C. Dwyer, B.A., M.D., B.Ch.—a pleasing combination of the Arts and Sciences—the loss of which combination I think we may still regret

The Hospital was scarcely in business before all concerned with it realised that its accommodation was quite inadequate. The first quarterly report says : "The public are aware that the amount of bed accommodation is very limited; yet during the last 3 months 50 patients have received medical care in the wards; of these, 3 were moribund on admission and died. The remainder were cured or much relieved. Considering that the majority of patients were medical cases, a mortality of 6 per cent is a rather low average—and tends to confirm the opinion entertained—of the suitability of the house for the purpose to which it has now been converted, and of the excellence of its sanitary arrangements". In the same period 675 patients attended the dispensary. The Surgeon Dentist attended once a week, which was quite an innovation for the times.

In the first annual report of 1884, the cry for more beds became louder; more so again the following year. This year saw the death of Dr. Dorrian. Before his death he gave instructions for the erection of a wing for 50–100 patients and plans were drawn up and approved by him. When he felt that his health was failing, he handed over the hospital to trustees—that it be enlarged, so as to make it suitable for medical education; and should this condition not be carried out, he required the Sisters to utilise the gift for other charitable purposes.

Dr. Dorrian appears to have been quite a remarkable man. During his entire Episcopate he had consistently aimed at establishing a University College in Belfast, having all the facilities of higher education, including a medical school—of which the hospital would form an integral and essential part. It is easy now to say that such a project was grandiose and even unwise; that it would have further divided a community which was even then split, and which still struggles uneasily and slowly towards unity and a common purpose; but it must be remembered that, at that time, Catholics were forbidden by their Church to attend the Queen's College.

In his work, "The Making of Modern Ireland," Professor J. C. Beckett of Queen's University, Belfast, tells the story of the Queen's Colleges, established by Peel in 1845. They were, he says, intended as a measure of conciliation to all

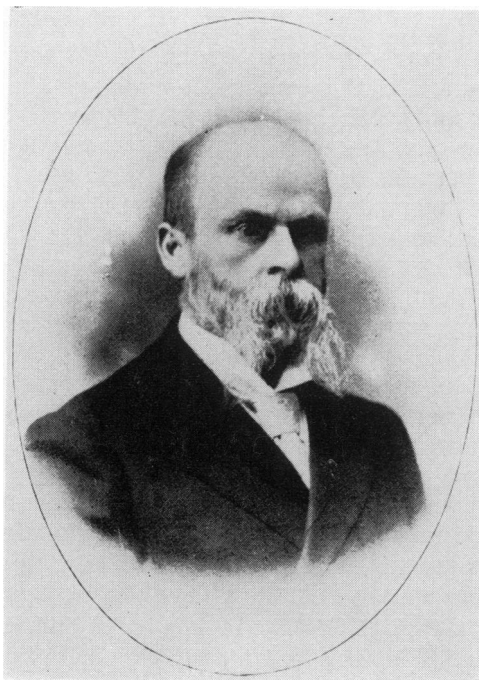
sections of the population but were not a success. Trinity, though it offered degrees to all, was for the established Church—its Scholarships and Fellowships were confined to that Church. The new Colleges were to be secular institutions, though arrangements were made by which the various denominations could provide for the pastoral care and religious instruction of their own students. But the scheme was attacked by all—Anglicans, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. The latter continued their opposition and in August 1850 an episcopal synod at Thurles issued a formal condemnation and warned the laity to shun the colleges. They acquired the unfortunate, and not wholly justified title of “The Godless Colleges of Peel”. Hence the remarks of that long dead chronicler which I would specially commend to all who have sought their education in the South: “They have consequently to seek their medical education in Dublin, and any person acquainted with that city knows the dangers—the terrible dangers—to which they are exposed. It is very few indeed who can steer their course free of the moral danger which is spread over the city. Many a young and promising life is blasted there for ever, which under other circumstances might have had a glorious future”.

So the cry for more beds is linked to the notion of medical teaching. It would be interesting to know if the same dark suspicions of Dublin life were entertained by the worthy gentlemen who were at the same time pressing for expansion of the old General Hospital into the new Royal Hospital. Aside from this, it was, of course, no mere coincidence that the Frederick Street establishment was also contemplating expansion. Belfast at the close of the century was very poorly provided with hospital accommodation. The population explosion between 1841 and 1891 was quite remarkable. From 75,308 to 255,922 it almost quadrupled. Burdetts Hospital Annual of 1883 shows that as regards hospital facilities we stood at the bottom of the list among the major cities of the British Isles (Fig. 3).

No.	Name of Town.	Population.	Number of Out-Patients.		Number and Class of Institution.	
			Total Number.	Number per 1000 of population.	General.	Special.
1	Liverpool	517,951	249,826	482	5	12
2	London	4,221,452	1,762,527	417	36	71
3	Edinburgh	261,979	101,991	389	2	6
4	Dublin	352,090	130,175	369	8	15
5	Bristol	221,665	79,254	357	2	4
6	Leicester	142,051	50,023	352	1	...
7	Brighton	115,402	39,563	343	1	5
8	Birmingham	561,147	174,135	310	2	12
9	Newcastle	186,345	55,488	292	1	6
10	Manchester	505,343	129,168	255	3	10
11	Wolverhampton	82,620	19,515	236	1	1
12	Leeds	367,506	74,674	203	1	3
13	Sheffield	324,243	58,608	180	2	5
14	Gateshead	85,709	15,270	178	...	2
15	Belfast	255,896	42,131	162	2	8

3. *An entry in Burdetts' Hospital Annual of 1883*

To further the project of the new Mater Hospital, a public meeting was held on September 25th, 1895, in St. Mary's Hall. The Bishop—now Dr. McAllister—announced that Mountview Terrace—seven terrace houses adjoining the old hospital—had been purchased for £2,600 and that plans were being drawn up for a new hospital of about 150 beds. Out of 14 designs submitted to Mr. Drew, President of the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland, the winning design had been submitted by Mr. William J. Fennell (Fig. 4). Fennell also designed the Water Commissioners' office in Royal Avenue—demolished in 1966—and was also the architect of the old Maternity Hospital in Townsend Street. It must, says C. E. B. Brett, in his book "Buildings of Belfast", have been a source of irritation to him that outsiders were brought in to design the Royal Victoria (Henman & Cooper of Birmingham).



4. *William J. Fennell, architect of the New Mater Hospital*

One is a little peeved to find the same author dismiss the Mater as "A rather depressing exercise in sub-Tudor red brick", but one's partisan feelings are mollified to find that the unusual design of the Royal was described by critical medical men at the time as "a cross between a factory and a goal".

A letter round that time, in the *Irish News*, announced the award, and the losers received their small honoraria—plus a consolation prize in the shape of a quotation from Paul to the Corinthians—"They that run in the race, all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize"—I Cor. 9, 24.

The High Sheriff of Antrim—Henry James McCance—presided at the meeting in St. Mary's Hall. There was present also a very forthright gentleman called

Samuel Young, M.P., who said, with obvious feeling : "It is certainly a pleasure to me to meet an assembly not collected for political or religious warfare or strife. There is one matter that one may cavil at. It will be under Catholic auspices, it may be said. It will be none the worse of that. Why should I not join heartily, though the mode of carrying out the operation may not be according to my theory".

It was, in fact, a well attended meeting, representing all sections of the community. The Ulster of that time appears to have been enjoying a brief spell of quiet and to be settling down to some sort of *modus vivendi*. The memory of the bitter sectarian riots of 1886 was fading, and the scene was temporarily peaceful—apart from a little quiet fun smouldering here and there.

On the same page of the paper which advertised a collection for the Mater we can read a speech of Parnell, then in his heyday. Two Orangmen are appearing in Court in Portadown over some small fracas. Two Hibernians are evening the score before a Magistrate in Dungannon. Lower down the page, a grisly little paragraph announces the public hanging in St. Stephen's Green of two youths convicted of robbery with violence. It sheds an interesting light on the stern, calm and utterly confident portraits of our forbears.

This inaugural meeting produced a good response, but the project lagged for a number of years. The new Bishop was then in poor health, and seems to have had a strong streak of caution. He was unwilling to go ahead with plans until more money was to hand. It was left to his successor, Dr. Henry, to expedite matters. By this time, as seems usual, the original £20,000 required had expanded to £50,000.

Accounts of collections make dreary enough reading, but there are one or two items of interest. One such is the penny collection. Each parish had its band of ladies—known as *Zealatorices*, presumably zealous women—who called in every home once a week and asked for a penny—no more. They brought in £1,000 a year. The second item was on a grander scale and was known as the Railway Set-off Scheme. The three railways were not at all helpful. Two of them, in fact, refused to subscribe a penny and only the County Down Railway ultimately gave a subscription. The fund raising committee, therefore, organised a scheme to cover every town served by a railway station. Each ran its concert, whist drive, or what have you, and the project was, it appears, a great success. Finally, there was the great bazaar—five days of concerts, exhibitions and sales of work in the Ulster Hall, which netted £10,000. Various posters were on display to encourage the generous. The whole collection operation is very reminiscent of that used by the Anti-corn Law League in England of an earlier date.

Part of the hospital appears to have been opened as early as 1899, when the Secretaries of the Royal University of Ireland notified the Medical Staff that the Mater Hospital had been added to the "list of institutions from which the University received certificates for degrees in Medicine". Again—and it indicates both the scarcity of beds and the urgency of the situation—in August of that year the Bishop asked the Medical Staff to open the wards of the East Pavilion for the reception of patients attacked by the typhoid epidemic. This was the notorious epidemic which ran into 27,000 cases in Belfast.

The building was now complete (Fig. 5), the formal opening was on April 22nd, 1900, and the ceremony was performed by the Lord Mayor, Sir Robert McConnell. Nice things were said by everyone, from Sir Robert to the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, and Mr. Wolff of Harland & Wolff, who arrived a little late for the launching, but was still, apparently, in time for the champagne.



5. *The Mater Infirmorum Hospital, 1900*

The recognition of the Mater, as a teaching hospital by Queen's University, dates from the implementation of the Irish Universities Act of 1908. This legislation was the work of Augustine Birrell, the Chief Secretary. The Royal University was abolished, and two new Universities established in its place—the National University of Ireland and the Queen's University of Belfast. This was essentially a political solution. Birrell started with the conviction that he must satisfy the claims of the Irish Bishops, who demanded some measure of effective control, and the new National University, although formally non-denominational, was so organised as to fulfil this condition.

Protestant opinion could hardly be expected to regard such a system as satisfactory: its establishment was only made possible by excluding Queen's College, Belfast—which was turned into an independent university, not, says Professor Beckett, because of a strong local demand but because there was nothing else to do with it. One of the oddest quirks of this whole settlement—and one of the least remembered things about him, in Ulster at any rate—is that Sir Edward Carson was a consistent supporter of Roman Catholic claims in the controversy over university education.

The adjustments required in the existing Queen's University by this Act were entrusted to a body known as the Belfast Commissioners. Representatives of the Mater Staff approached this body, to lay down before them their case for teaching.

"We hope," they said, "that the Commission will devise a plan whereby this valuable clinical hospital will be utilised and become a source of strength to the University". Judge Shaw, the Chairman of the Commissioners, welcomed the deputation and stated that he sympathised with its objects, as widening the bases of support for the new University. He then asked Sir Donald McAllister, President of

the General Medical Council, to speak on the medical aspects of the question. Sir Donald agreed that the University could approve lecturers in Clinical Medicine and Surgery in any recognised hospital, and from there examiners would be selected in rotation. And so, on the recommendation of the Senate, the Mater Hospital was included among the institutions recognised for teaching purposes. A member of its staff was appointed as one of the four "University Clinical Lecturers" chosen each year to represent the Staff of the Teaching Hospitals on the Faculty of Medicine, and to act as internal examiners in the degree examinations.

Teaching began, when on 9th October, 1908, the new Bishop, Dr. Tohill, agreed without any demur to the opening of a Clinical School. It was a source of deep satisfaction to the staff and the end of a long fight. Dr. Henry had maintained inflexibility to the end, his opposition to anything less than a second University. They threw themselves into the job of teaching with energy and enthusiasm, and with very considerable success. I should like to quote you an extract from a letter to the Commissioners of June 13th, 1910, from J. B. Moore, then Secretary of the Staff :

"We are convinced that the Clinical School of the University, as far as the two main subjects of Medicine and Surgery are concerned, should be based on the two large General Hospitals, which are equipped for and have been giving efficient clinical teaching, viz., the Royal Victoria Hospital and the Mater Infirmorum Hospital.

"The latter hospital has now had a clinical class for two winter and two summer sessions, and the efficiency of the teaching given in its wards is strikingly demonstrated by the attached list of prizes for fourth year students of the University at the sessional examinations at the end of the winter session 1909-10.

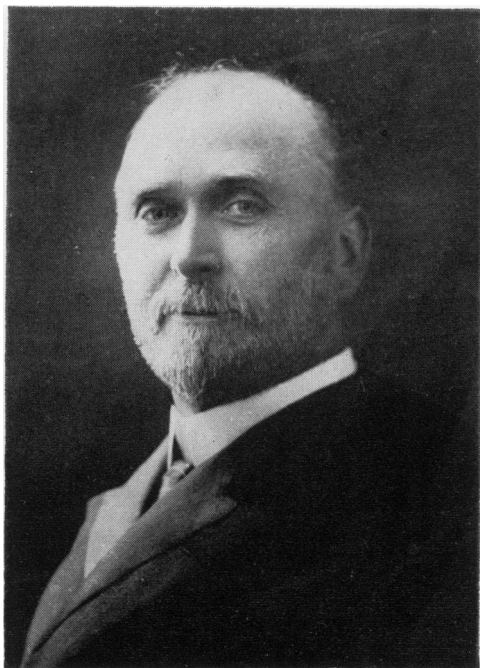
"The class at the Mater has been small, yet the Commissioners will observe that out of nine prize-winners seven were Mater students and that in Medicine and Surgery, all the four prizes were carried off by Mater Hospital students".

There follows a nice "throw-away line" : "While we do not attach too much importance to these results, we feel justified in drawing the Commissioners' attention to them, as proving that the teaching of the Mater is efficient, and that it attracts the best men of the year."

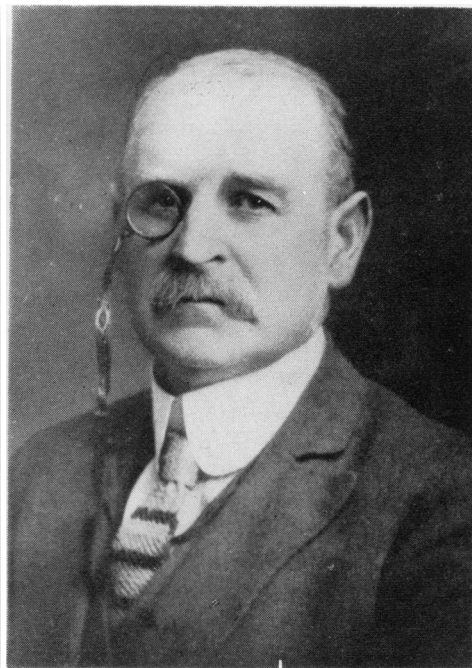
It was an auspicious start, and there followed a fruitful period of growth and expansion to around the end of the World War I. The links with the University were strengthened. Royal and Mater were quite closely and happily linked and there was a free interchange of students. The sectarian lines were only faintly visible and were more easily crossed.

The late W. J. Wilson was our first pathologist, a man beloved of many generations of students, both then and when he left for the Department of Hygiene in Queen's, as it was once called. He was followed by Professors Symmers, Drennan and Young, all on the Staff of the Mater. Last, but by no means least in the line is, of course, Sir John Henry Biggart, who still, when in lighter mood, occasionally refers to himself as the last of the Honorary Consultants.

W. W. D. Thompson — later Professor of Medicine — began his career as



6. *Sir Alexander Dempsey*



7. *James Bernard Moore*

Clinical Pathologist in the Mater in 1912 and was later a Physician on the Staff, until he left in 1919 to take up an appointment in the Royal Victoria.

Three men, prominent, in those early days of the Mater, deserve special mention. Time does not permit me to talk of too many. First in seniority is Sir Alexander Dempsey (Fig. 6). He began practice in Donegall Street in 1854 and was on the Staff from the beginning of the Hospital. He and Drs. William McKeown and John Moore established the Northern Ireland Branch of the British Medical Association and he subsequently became its President. He was also a President of this Society. In 1880 he was appointed a magistrate, acted for some time on the Joint Board of the Belfast and County Asylums, and was on the Visiting Committee of the Belfast Prison. He was active in the settlement of the University question, was a member of the National University Senate and a member of the Governing Body of University College, Dublin. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, London, and of the British Gynaecological Society, and a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Medicine of Ireland. Indeed, a man of distinction. He was knighted in 1904 by His Majesty King Edward VIII, and his firm signature sprawls across the Minute Book of the Medical Staff Committee for the next 15 or 16 years.

James Bernard Moore (Fig. 7) graduated from the Queen's College, Cork, with honours in 1890, after a brilliant undergraduate career that bristled with prizes and exhibitions. From Cork he went to St. Mungo's, Glasgow. At this time he seems to have been chiefly interested in Pathology and left St. Mungo's with the first prize in practical Pathology.

He started in practice in Belfast on the Mountpottinger Road in 1894 and joined the Assistant Staff of the Mater in 1896, becoming a member of the Senior Staff in 1900. Surgery became his dominant interest and he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland, in 1909. His subsequent career spans the two World Wars, and I recall him vividly when I first went to the Mater as a student. A good teacher, terse and pungent in his descriptions; not a man to suffer fools gladly. He was the only man I have ever known who consistently finished the Sunday Times crossword before lunch.

He was a reticent man and not given to talking much about himself. A pity, for his professional lifetime covered a lot of changes and many turbulent times in this city. There are two stories, which I owe to his son, Dr. Seamus Moore, which shed some light on him and the times in which he lived.

In World War I he was appointed a Consultant Surgeon to the British Army and was a frequent visitor to Victoria Barracks. This became something of a trial to him in 1916 when the Army in a literal sense took him to its bosom. On all calls to the barracks he was provided with an armed escort who called for him at his home in Clifton Street, marched him through the gates, followed him to the operating theatre and remained at the doors to lead him out and march him home again. He could never decide whether this was in recognition of his value, or because of a suspicion that he was at the same time acting also as Consultant Surgeon to the Irish Republican Army.

Rather later—in the troubled 20's—he earned a compliment of another kind. At that time a well known sniper of reasonable efficiency had established himself by night at the base of the statue in Carlisle Circus. From this strategic point, complete with rifle, sandwiches and Guinness he used to enliven the hours of darkness by taking a pot at anything which moved between North Queen Street and Carrick Hill, which practice made night calls to the Mater something of a gamble. Nemesis—in the shape of an acute appendix—struck this warrior one winter evening, and he was carried groaning into the Mater. During his stay he was only known to speak once. That was while he lay on the operating table, while Barney Moore stood by with knife poised, and the anaesthetist dribbled on the chloroform. His words were heartfelt, colourful and unprintable. I can only give you a rough translation: “God damn my four-lettering soul; the four-lettering Fenians have got me and they’re four-lettering going to finish me off”. Well, he survived and returned to active duty! His sole tribute to the Hippocratic Oath was to cease firing when J. B. Moore appeared in Clifton Street on his errands of mercy to the Mater..

John O'Doherty, who spent some 30 years on the Surgical Staff, was probably the last of the truly general surgeons. He was prepared and willing to remove the thyroid, or any expendible part from that to the uterus, and was equally at home with the bougie or the curette.

Small, rotund, with as many waistcoats as an onion, he peered out on the world from behind enormous glasses and had an enormous interest in everyone and everything. He was equally informal with dustman or duchess. There is indeed a delightful story of his conversation with a distinguished lady during a royal tour of the hospital. They disappeared down a corridor on their own, John linking her familiarly by the elbow, and talking away happily, ten to the dozen. A fascinated

houseman, treading as close as he dare on the heels of the great, heard the familiar opening: "There was a fellow once . . ." and the story went on to describe a treatment which Mr. O'Doherty held in great contempt—the enclosure of a limb in plaster for long periods for compound fractures and the like. "And then," said he, "after a year they took it off". "And was his leg better?" asked her Ladyship, trapped in fascinated horror by his eye. "Not at all, dear; it fell off."

As a teacher he was never dull. Some of his axioms might be dubious; they were certainly memorable. I can recall one that still puzzles me: "What you can cut you can tie", or should it be, "What you can tie you can cut"?

He could be generous, and on one occasion he personally donated half the cost of some X-ray apparatus. Unfortunately, like so many donors, he attached a little string to the gift, and had decided views on where it should be set-up. The Staff disagreed, and told him briefly, if inelegantly, where he could put it. It seems, however, that all was settled amiably, and a more satisfactory arrangement was made.

The period which stretches through the 20's and the 30's was a difficult and unhappy time, not only for the Mater but for the whole city; a time of bitterness and bloodshed that kept all our hospitals busy, but strained friendships and soured relationships.

In the mid-thirties there came again a time of growth and expansion that saw the building of a new nurses' home and a new extern department. The latter was built on ground belonging to the jail and an Act of Parliament was needed for its transfer. In the end it realised only half its projected size because of the unfortunate proximity of the prison.

In 1945 the Maternity Unit was opened. It is interesting to find in old records that a Maternity Wing was actually in operation in 1912—St. Mary's Maternity Hospital, in Lonsdale Terrace. However, it fades out during World War I when it appears to have been used for an overflow of war casualties and it was never reopened.

The present building (Fig. 8) comprised at first two terrace houses—soon to be three—adapted to the purpose at a cost of about £20,000. The cost was high, for the end result could never be really satisfactory. The opening ceremony was quiet for it was only seen as a modest beginning, and no one concerned ever hoped or dreamt that it would still be in existence some 23 years later. I had the privilege—if not the pleasure—of being the first House Surgeon. It was no pleasure, for my ignorance was colossal, and I had an even greater and more wary respect for the problems of obstetrics than I have now. It is still our ambition and our hope to escape to a better environment, and the notion of teaching obstetrics, which goes back to the early years of the century, is with us still, and still concerns us vitally.

The most recent chapter in our history, since 1948, is familiar to us all, and I would only mention briefly the fascinating growth of the Young Philanthropists Association, which has virtually maintained this hospital since 1948. It was originally a small society of young men who raised money for the Mater in the usual way of concerts, dances and other social functions—once a common enough feature of all voluntary hospitals. In the early 1950's they mushroomed into the Y.P. Pools—a large and thriving organisation which has provided the major slice



8. *Maternity Unit of the Mater Infirmorum Hospital*

of our income ever since. They are something of a “silent service”; they have constantly sought publicity for the hospital—never for themselves.

So much for our story. I might perhaps finish with a few extracts from the old Staff Minute Book, which even through the rusty ink and the illegible doctors’ writing gives us some idea of the flavour of the place, and the people who ran it.

They were not without a sense of their own importance. It is recorded on July 6th, 1912: “The gong shall be sounded when the Surgeon or Physician on duty arrives”.

They were men of discretion. There is, in the early days, a guarded reference to a man who achieved the rare distinction of causing a mutiny among the theatre staff. One is left tantalised and speculative as to what he said or did to provoke a body of women notorious for their loyalty.

Women were relegated to their proper place in the scheme of things. One reads in 1902 of the appointment of one Janet Pirret of Glasgow and Winifred Thorp of London as House Officers, and feels that, for their time, the Staff were a liberal and enlightened body of men. Alas, the truth emerges in 1905—“for a number of years we were obliged to appoint female medical officers, and while the Medical Staff have no reason to complain of the manner in which they discharged their duties, they were not suitable for all the various duties of a large general hospital”. Damned with faint praise!

There is no doubt that in those far-off happy days a Resident Medical Officer was considered fortunate to be alive and to tend to his betters. In 1901 £30 per

annum was thought to be a very reasonable emolument. In 1912 they clearly repented of such generosity and the stipend dropped to £20. They were sacked, too, in a casual fashion that might well be the envy of any modern industrialist—usually for such serious offences as appearing in court and collecting fees intended for their seniors or persistently appearing late on the morning round. One such death sentence has, I think, a truly classic ring: “That Dr. X, having left the hospital without the permission of the Medical Staff, a vacancy be declared in that office.”

They found it easier to give exact definitions than we in our more sophisticated age—as in a reply to a question by the Bishop: “An anaesthetist, my Lord, is a person who attends in the morning and gives chloroform during operations”.

Very little of interest appears during the 20's. There is one exception—an indignant outburst, when on the night of June 7th, 1922, the hospital was subjected to machine gun and rifle fire for 45 minutes during the hours of darkness. On the following day the Staff drafted a telegram of protest and demanded immediate military protection. They sent it, with admirable impartiality to: The King, the Rt. Hon. Lloyd George, the Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill, and Mr. Michael Collins, of the Irish Republican Army. Presumably someone sent help, or the situation, through public protest, was not repeated; and the record subsides again into the humdrum account of ordinary business.

By and large, of course, those things which are—to the lay mind—dramatic, are taken for granted by doctors. The really important things are tucked quietly away in case histories; the triumphs and failures are itemised in sober and unsensational terms.

One recalls, for example—and very vividly—one of the nights when the city was heavily bombed; when a land mine exploded no more than 100 yards away from the hospital; when the Nurses' Home was in flames and when, at one point, bodies were stacked high against the wall of the jail which runs towards the mortuary, because there was nowhere else to put them. The Staff recorded it in three lines of dry and unemotional prose.

One closes the book with mixed feelings—some regret that so little is set down; that only the odd flash of a personality illumines the faded ink; some sense also of an achievement and of a continuity of a tradition; some feeling of encouragement to retain and pass on what one has received—and the wry reflection also that one has trespassed too long on your patience, and that perhaps, good hospitals should be like good women—they should have no history.